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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 0373
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 3999
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SUBJECT: SEOUL - MEDIA REACTION

East Asia and Pacific: DPRK

"Sealing Off Kaesong Is the Wrong Move"

Conservative Chosun Ilbo editorialized (03/10): "Countries such as China and Russia also conduct military drills with their allies. Furthermore, other neighboring countries, excluding North Korea, are not citing any problems with the latest exercises. Accordingly, the observations of ROK and foreign analysts - that North Korea is ratcheting up tensions to unite its people under a common cause - gains more credence, especially given that the North is in the midst of a regime reshuffle, launching its 12th Supreme People's Assembly.

By ratcheting up tensions at a time when the Obama Administration is reviewing its entire global policies, including the North Korean nuclear issue, North Korea may succeed to some degree in diverting the world's attention onto the Korean Peninsula. However, its typical method of grabbing attention by overturning the table leads to more losses than gains. It only diminishes the North's international credibility by further consolidating its image as a 'troublemaker' intent on creating more problems on top of its nuclear program."

"Protect Kaesong Workers"

Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo editorialized (03/10): "Cutting off military communications means that the last channel for the two Koreas to communicate in case of an emergency has disappeared. If an accidental clash takes place between the two Koreas, a failure to communicate might mean a war. Since the Lee Myung-bak Administration was launched, Pyongyang has put pressure on Seoul by expelling South Korean authorities from the industrial complex, reducing the number of South Korean workers stationed there and imposing strict limits on land travel in and out of the North. Now it has taken the extreme measure of paralyzing the transportation of manpower and goods. The North says that the blackout will only be in effect during the military exercise, but if the situation worsens, the safety of South Korean workers stationed in the industrial complex could be seriously jeopardized."

"A New Low of Kim Jong-il"

Conservative Dong-a Ilbo editorialized (03/10): "North Korea..."

blocked the return of 80 ROK people who sought to go home from the inter-Korean industrial complex in the North Korean border city of Kaesong. This 'detention' was a de facto provocation. This is quite a precarious action that a normal country would not consider.

Even a small mistake can lead to confrontation in a stand-off situation. To prevent this, military communications were set up. The North must be afraid of how the international community, as well as the ROK and the U.S., will respond to the cutoff of the hotline."

"Safe Return of ROK Workers at Kaesong Should Be Ensured"

Moderate Hankook Ilbo editorialized (03/10): If North Korea continues to block ROK people in the Kaesong Industrial Complex from returning home, it is an intolerable act of detention. For any reason, it is not acceptable to restrict the passage of civilians who have nothing to do with military drills or political issues. North Korea must immediately return those who hope to come home as soon as possible. Many ROK people feel anxious about North Korea's repeated threats of merciless military retaliation. However, observers say that it would be difficult for the North to carry out a military move risking an all-out war. North Korea's threats, which have reached its peak, can be an expression of its fears about the 'Key Resolve' military exercises mobilizing massive military force and firepower. We should not respond to the North's threats too sensitively."

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"No Communication Line between the Two Koreas"

Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun editorialized (03/10): "North Korea is limiting this latest action to the period of the ROK-U.S. 'Key Resolve' military exercises. Some observers hold that Pyongyang is not going to do anything really extreme as long as it has hopes of improving relations with the U.S. Not that this latest development should be taken lightly, either. This North Korean move is an extension of its March 5 warning that ROK civilian airplanes would no longer be allowed through the North's airspace and the earlier declaration that it would invalidate all inter-Korean military agreements. So it is possible that North Korea could play yet another card, even after the military exercises are over, if changes are not brought to the current, chilly relations between the two Koreas."

STEPHENS